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U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

December 13, 2004

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ROBERT S. RANGEL, STAFF DIRECTOR

General Richard B. Myers
Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
The Pentagon
Washington DC 20310

Dear General Myers:

I am concerned that the recent discussions in the press regarding the lack of armor in Iraq are a symptom of a larger problem with U.S. forces in Iraq. This problem has links to the Vietnam War. As I am sure you are aware, in the early days of that war the Army sent only infantry forces based on a mistaken belief that armor forces were inappropriate. It was only after several years that the Army leadership recognized that armor forces could make a significant contribution. One of the most successful units in Vietnam was the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, which was equipped with M-113 Armored Cavalry Assault Vehicles (ACAVs) and M-48 tanks. Armed with multiple machine guns behind gun shields, the M-113 proved itself an especially effective vehicle for close combat in jungles against enemy forces armed with RPGs and AK-47 rifles.

I understand that the M-113 may not provide the same level of protection as some other armored vehicles currently in use, but they certainly provide better protection than soft-skinned vehicles. Moreover, I believe that the M-113 chassis is robust enough to easily accommodate the additional weight of supplemental armor kits, whereas the HMMWV struggles under the burden, and it is causing significant maintenance issues. As you know, broken-down up-armored HMMWVs provide no protection at all.

I have read reports where earlier this year, the deputy director of Army Material Command said he had seven hundred M-113 series vehicles prepositioned in Kuwait. Are they still there? I know you share my concern that we provide our fighting men and women with the very best equipment available. While we await delivery of additional up-armored HMMWVs, I would like you to revisit the possibility of using the M-113s the Army already has on hand as a means to provide them additional mobile protection. Could they point toward a solution to the Army's challenge in supplying armored transportation to protect our soldiers?

Sincerely,



Ike Skelton
Ranking Member